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SHERWOOD BONNER

HER LIFE AND PLACE IN THE LITERATURE OF THE SOUTH

BY

ALEXANDER L. BONDURANT, A. M. (HARVARD)

PROFESSOR OF THE LATIN LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN THE
UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI

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SHERWOOD BONNER--HER LIFE AND PLACE IN THE LITERATURE OF THE SOUTH.

BY ALEXANDER L. BONDURANT, A. M. (HARVARD).

The life of Sherwood Bonner illustrates the union of the subtle elements, ancestral traits and personal qualities, which, distilled by the alchemist, Dame Nature, in her alembic produce the individual.

Her father, Dr. Charles Bonner, was born in Ireland, but his family left their ancestral home when he was quite young, and settled in Pennsylvania. When he arrived at man's estate, he left the North, and like Prentiss and Boyd turned his face Southward. He reached Mississippi in "Flush Times," and was content to dwell there, for he found a cultured, refined people, who recognized in him a kindred spirit.

In her novel, "Like unto Like," Sherwood Bonner thus describes the home of his adoption: "The climate was delicious. Winter never came with whirl of wind and wonder of piling snow, but as a temperate king with spring peeping to meet him, before autumn's rustling skirts had quite vanished round the corner. Yet there was not the monotony of eternal summer. Winter sometimes gave more than hints of power to the pert knaves of flowers who dared to spring up with a wave of their blooming caps in his face; and the peach-trees that blossomed too soon were apt to get their pale pink heads enclosed in glittering ice-caps, through which they shone with resplendent beauty for a day then meekly died. Even a light snow fell at times; and everybody admired it and shivered at it, and said the climate was changing, and built great wood-fires, and tacked list around the doors, and piled blankets on the beds, to wake in the morning to find sunshine and warmth—and mud. But for the most

part, the days, one after another, were as perfect as Guido's dancing hours."

She thus speaks of the people whom both she and her father loved: "They had the immense dignity of those who live in inherited homes, with the simplicity of manner that comes of an assured social position. They were handsome, healthy, full of physical force as all people must be who ride horseback.....and do not lie awake at night to wonder why they were born. That they were Southerners was, of course, their first cause of congratulation. After a Northern tour they were glad to come home and tell how they were recognized as Southerners everywhere—in the cars, shops, and theatres. They felt their Southern air and accent a grace and a distinction, separating them from a people who walked fast, talked through their noses, and built railroads."

The young physician found the sun which caused the flowers to bud, to blossom, to give forth rich fragrance not less kind to the daughters of the Southern village whither he had journeyed; but one seemed to him fairer than all the rest, and he sought to make her his own. Miss Mary Wilson is said to have been both lovable and beautiful. Fortune favored his wooing so they were soon wedded. Their means were ample and Dr. Bonner retired from the active practice of his profession, dividing his time between the management of his estates, and the dispensing of an elegant hospitality in his own home. He was always a great lover of books and possessed a fine mind, but had no ambition beyond his class; and while believing in and honoring woman to the highest degree, he thought her place to be the home.

His library was large and carefully selected, and he directed in large measure the reading of his family. We surmise that the daughter is giving an episode in her own life when she has Blythe Herndon tell Roger Ellis that she never disobeyed her father's injunction about books but once, that having exhausted everything else in the library, she climbed up to the forbidden shelf and took from it a copy of "Tom Jones." But, says Blythe, "papa scolded; to this day I have never known whether Tom married Sophia." Dr. Bonner

was an honorable, courteous, cultured gentleman, another Thomas Dabney. The daughter being asked by Mr. Harper, of Harper and Brothers, where she obtained such a fine command of English, replied with great dignity, "In my father's house."

From her father Sherwood Bonner inherited her love for books, and her keen sense of humor, her best gift from the gods; from her mother came beauty and a charming femininity.

Five children were born to Dr. and Mrs. Bonner; Katherine Sherwood, born February 26, 1849; Ruth Martin, now Mrs. David McDowell, who lives at Holly Springs, Mississippi; Samuel Wilson, who died of yellow fever in '78; and two other children, who died in infancy.

The family residence built by Dr. Bonner is still standing. It is a commodious brick mansion, built in Gothic style, with a wide portico in front, and ample windows opening to the floor. The house stands well back from the street, surrounded by a spacious lawn. One enters a wide hall, and on the left is seen the library, where in winter a wood fire is kept burning. The room is a very charming one, and afforded a most appropriate setting for the writer at her desk. This room is connected with the hall by folding doors. On the right is the drawing-room.

One seeing the fair haired baby-girl in this luxurious, well-ordered Southern home, would probably have said that she was destined to become what her mother before her had been, charming, well read, and, according to prevailing standards, educated. But in addition to these inherited qualities, Sherwood Bonner possessed that strong individuality that made her a writer. As a child she was fond of play, but she loved books and stories better still, and games ceased to charm, if gran'mammy consented to tell her the story of the wonderful adventure of "Brer Rabbit" and "The Tar Baby," or some of his other escapades, or if her papa came in bringing her a fresh volume of fairy stories.

Her first effort at original composition was while she was still wearing pinafores. It came about in this way: she

and a playmate lost their temper, and, forgetting that they were little gentlewomen, began to fight like two waifs with no family dignity to uphold. Kate got her frock torn, and later when her mother asked her the cause of the quarrel, she handed her a paper, with a tragic air, saying, "Read this, it will tell you all."

She was not universally popular as a child, for she manifested a precociousness that separated her, in large measure, from her kind; but she attracted strongly those whom she really liked and was, at an early age, the queen of a little coterie of her own. In childhood she was distinguished for loyalty, a ready wit and a keen sense of humor; qualities that made the warp and woof of her nature, and but strengthened when the maid was merged in the woman.

Her education was conducted under her father's eye, and as he pressed the chalice to eager lips, little did he guess that he was entertaining genius unawares. At school she could not have been accounted a hard student. Her mind slaked its thirst at the pure fountain of the muses; history was a joy, literature a delight, and the composition, a task hated by most of her schoolmates, a pleasant pastime; but she looked askance at the sciences, and pronounced life too short for geometry. During her last year at school she wrote an allegory. It is the work of a tyro in art, but was regarded by her schoolmates a remarkable production.

The morning of her life was bright, and with father, mother, sister, brother, around the family hearth, each passing day brought added happiness. Even the dark clouds that began to lower in the North, ere she passed the limits of girlhood, did not bring sadness, for she with many older heads in the South failed to comprehend what these foreshadowed. But she was now to receive the baptism of sorrow, and to gain through suffering needed training and added strength.

"Who tears to other eyes would bring
Must first have tasted sorrow."

She was just sixteen, she had written something and

it had been accepted, her heart was aglow with visions of the future, when the desolating blow fell upon her home. The much loved mother was taken from her, the rude shock and turmoil of war being too much for that gentle spirit.

We find this entry in Sherwood Bonner's scrapbook in her own hand: "First story ever published, aged fifteen, *Boston Ploughman*, twenty dollars." Underneath, the story is pasted in. It was called "Laura Capello, A Leaf from a Traveler's Notebook." It is a mystery story, highly melodramatic and crude, but containing the promise of a rich fulfillment as the bud contains the rose. It deals with the lot of a young girl whose life is the fruit of unhallowed love. The scene is laid in Italy, the land of mystery, and the story is given to the world by a young American artist, whom a capricious fate enmeshes, and makes an unwilling actor in the drama. The sketch shows dramatic power, and abounds in vivid description.

Mr. Nahum Capen, the author of "The Republic of the United States," "History of Democracy," and other works, was at this time connected with *The Ploughman*. He was the friend of Longfellow, Lowell and Emerson, and was selected by Hawthorne as the first one to read his first book, which appeared anonymously. He was the intimate friend and adviser also of Irving. Under his tutelage Sherwood Bonner first essayed Grub street, and he never ceased to take a keen interest in her, and was to the day of her death her trusted adviser and friend. He urged her to write, and encouraged her work with kindly, but discriminating words of praise. "Laura Capello" was followed by "A Flower of the South," published in a musical journal. Somewhat later a piece called "An Exposition on one of the Commandments" was sent to *Frank Leslie's Journal*.

In 1871, Sherwood Bonner became the wife of Mr. Edward McDowell, a gentlemen of refinement and liberal culture; like his wife he was a native of Holly Springs. The young wife assumed with earnestness the responsibilities of the new life and when her husband determined to try his for-

tune in the frontier state of Texas, she went with him into a country that was little better than a wilderness. But the venture failed and the young people returned to Holly Springs poorer in purse than when they left. A daughter was born to them, and for her child henceforth the mother in large measure seemed to live. Like George Sand, she found in motherhood love's deepest expression. At this crisis of affairs, the young wife and mother recalled her talent, and remembering the kind words that had come to her from Boston, she determined to go thither, and try her fortune with her pen. In Boston she became a member of Mr. Capen's family, and under his eye, and with his encouragement, continued her work.

She had the gift of clear vision, and at once perceived that the defects of her early training must be overcome if she was to write that which the world would read; so she studied closely, books, men and manners. The North received her lucubrations with a criticism that was in the main kindly, and ere long she had made for herself a place in "The Moral Lighthouse" as she playfully denominates Boston. After several years she was able to have with her her child and the aunt who since her mother's death had striven to supply her place. But she counted that she was only sojourning in the North. The place of her birth she ever spoke of as "home," and a portion of each year she spent amidst the dear familiar scenes.

Soon after going North she met the poet Longfellow. He recognized her talent, became her warm personal friend, and lent her aid and encouragement in her work. She in turn seemed to impart new vigor to the white-haired poet. She became his private secretary and collaborator. At her suggestion he compiled "Poems of Places, Southern States," and she assisted in this work. It is a quaint conceit of the poet which causes him to treat the South as a separate country. In that interesting book, "Poets' Homes," appears a description of Longfellow's home written by her. It is given the place of honor in the book, but by a strange oversight no

credit is given to the author. In one of her early letters from Boston, published in the *Memphis Avalanche* she writes: "A great man and a poet, who enjoys the additional distinction of being my very good friend, read my first letter written for your columns, with an evident amusement, which he made a commendable effort to suppress. 'This is too bad,' frowned he, between smiles, 'don't do it again. Write about the good side of Boston next time.'"

She wrote a number of letters for Southern newspapers in a style that the ordinary newspaper man would strive in vain to emulate, though she regarded the letters as mere potboilers. They give interesting accounts of the happenings in Boston, and her impressions of Boston's great men: Emerson, William Lloyd Garrison, Oliver Wendell Holmes and Wendell Phillips. She says of Boston: "For the native Bostonian there are three paths to glory. If his name be Quincy or Adams, nothing more is expected of him. His blue blood carries him through life with glory and straight to heaven when he dies. Failing in the happy accident of birth, the candidate for Beacon Hill honors must write a book. This is easy. The man who can breathe Boston air and not write a book is either a fool or a phenomenon. One course remains to him should he miss fame in both these lines. He must be a reformer."

She thus speaks of her meeting with Mr. Emerson: "The unaffected charm of Mr. Emerson's manner soon restored me to my normal serenity, and the interview progressed delightfully for both of us. He has the purest and most refined face I have ever seen, and his smile is something to be remembered forever. Of course we spoke of the South, and he expressed the opinion that the Southern man had a more elegant manner and a finer physical frame than the Northerner, but must generally yield the palm in intellect. And to this I assented sorrowfully enough, recalling as I did, the small returns from the stock I took in a certain Philo club, where I spent the ambrosial evenings of my life and pinned my faith to several masculine coat sleeves of in-

tellectual giants pro tempore, who would have brought my tawny hair down in sorrow to the grave—if I hadn't taken the pin out.

"Mr. Emerson has a way of looking off into the distance as he speaks or listens which is very poetic and beautiful. I liked it, but yet I was not happy, for I had a knot of purple violets in my hair, and I distrusted this way of appreciating them. I don't wear violets every day; nor for the Colonel who talks politics to me; nor for the young preacher who propounds chemical conundrums. And so they meant something in this case; perhaps to subtly express the homage of a Southern heart, that I had no skill to put into words. I dare say, however, the great man received a general impression of sweetness and perhaps it is well he did not trace it to outside influences.

"On the whole, Mr. Emerson personally strikes me as one who might falsify that comprehensive saying that no man is a hero to his valet, as I cannot imagine him under any circumstances other than the consistent high-toned man, who beyond all scholarship and learning

'Still may hear without abuse
That grand old name of gentleman.'"

She thus describes her impressions of Carl Schurz, the occasion on which she saw him being a Sumner memorial meeting: "He is German in accent but not in appearance. His full whiskers are red, not blonde. And his features have none of the Teutonic heaviness, but are rather characterized by the sagacious sharpness of the American. The eulogy was very fine, and repeated bursts of applause testified to the enthusiasm of the audience. Most especially I must note the warm and hearty reception accorded that part of the address in which Mr. Schurz spoke of the noble and manly stand taken by Mr. Lamar, of Mississippi, and paid a just tribute to his brilliant eloquence, which was especially grateful to my Southern pride."

In the following paragraph she gives her Southern readers a pen picture of her poet friend:

"Longfellow was there from his beautiful historic home. Bret Harte calls him his 'ideal poet,' and as one looks upon his gracious, benignant face, framed in silvery hair, and reverently notes the broad thoughtful brow, and the eyes from which love toward all mankind seemed to beam, it is easy to comprehend how the perfect harmony between the man and his works should win from one, a poet himself, the highest praise he could possibly bestow."

In her stories Longfellow suggested that she write of the life around her, but she chose, and wisely, the life of the South that she knew best, and the poet admitted in the end that her instinct had led her aright. Before '76 she wrote some of the "Gran'mammy Stories" and other short sketches that found a ready sale. Longfellow said that she would be "the American writer of the future."

Eleven years after "Laura Capello" was written its author visited the scenes where the plot was laid. She enjoyed deeply this foreign travel, and has left a partial record of it in letters published in Boston and Southern papers, and in her private correspondence. She writes thus to a friend from Rome: "I am living every hour, never have I known days of such enchantment; Roman violets that make the air sweet, Roman fleas that bite with a Swinburne ardor, Roman donkeys that bray in the early morning, Roman shops that bewilder with their gems, shopmen who will make you buy whether you will or no; even in these delights I revel, so what can I say of the pictures, the statues, the ruins of Rome? Do you remember how my Lilian exhausted her raptures after the first layer of her box, and sat afterwards in a mute adoring ecstasy? Think of Lilian's mother in the same position."

Several days were spent by her party at a little coast town in France. At times the hours lagged, so the little group, like the young people in the *Decameron*, devised game and story to amuse themselves. Sherwood Bonner showed herself the most fruitful of device, and became the leader in the sport. She devised a game that was played with avidity.

The loser each time was supposed to pay the forfeit by taking his life with his own hands. A wan young Scotsman who had been "Ordered South" chanced to be one of the party and participated in the game. For the rest it was a pleasing pastime, but for him it had a tragic suggestion, for at that time Robert Louis Stevenson—it was no less than he—had begun that hand to hand conflict with disease that terminated fatally twenty years later. It is thought that he received from this game the suggestion of that very unusual story of his, "The Suicide Club."

Home at last came this busy working bee after her flitting in distant lands. "The Crest of the White Hat," "Rosine's Story," and other sketches show the effect of this foreign travel. The years following were filled with hard work; ever attaining, but never quite satisfied, she strove to make each piece better than the last. During this period she wrote a clever characterization in verse of "The Radical Club," which set all Boston to laughing.

Sometimes she had her hours of despondency as when she wrote a friend, "Put up a tablet for me in case I join the mermaids and write on it,

Death came to set me free,
I met him cheerily
As my true friend."

During the summer of '78 yellow fever raged in many parts of the South. The citizens of Holly Springs with a noble disregard for consequences offered an asylum to the refugees from the stricken town of Grenada; in this way the plague was introduced, and of the first hundred who took the fever only ten survived.

Sherwood Bonner was in the North at the time, but she at once hurried to Holly Springs to urge her loved ones to seek a place of safety. But the old physician would not go and his son remained with him; they were soon stricken with fever; she nursed by their bedside during the weary hours of their sickness; and they died in her arms on the same day. She escaped the disease, but left Holly Springs broken in health from her constant vigils, and wounded in spirit.

She wrote an account of the plague for *The Youth's Companion*, from which the following extract is taken: "It is not alone to see loved ones die; it is to dread their dying kiss. It is not to watch the dear dead face until the coffin lid is closed above it, but to turn, shuddering, from the face where you can see waves of change follow each other, until it has become a yellow transfigured mask. It is not to see the folded hand clasping flowers, the dear forms enshrouded in fresh grave-clothes, nor to see them laid away with prayers uttered above them, and friends standing by with uncovered heads, but it is to know—with what intensity of horror!—that these forms are changed to a poison so deadly, that death can be tasted in the air around them, and love itself shrinks from rendering its last sad offices. It is to know that they are buried, wrapped hastily in sheets, sometimes uncoffined, hurried to deep graves, without friends, or mourners, or care, by hirelings, who slight and dread their task."

After the publication of "Like unto Like" she found ready publishers. Mr. Conant, the editor of *Harper's Weekly*, said to her, "I accept your articles now without reading them in advance, your signature is enough." Enduring fame was hers if she could only live to grasp it, but ere the noon hour was reached, the worker was laid low. She began to feel the approach of an insidious disease, which she strove in vain to throw off. Not wishing to distress her loved ones she spoke of it to only a few friends, who finally persuaded her to consult the best medical authority. The physician when he saw her perfect physique expressed his surprise at her coming. He made the examination, but hesitated to state the result. She would have the whole truth and he pronounced her death sentence, telling her that she had but a single year of life. She met her fate with fortitude, and determined to make the most of the few remaining months, in order to provide a competency for the loved ones that she must soon leave.

She worked on to the very gates of death, her courage never forsaking her; and even when her good right hand was

useless she continued to dictate to an amanuensis, and was satisfied with nothing short of the best work.

February 14, 1883, she wrote:

A LONGED-FOR VALENTINE

Come to my aching heart, my weary soul,
And give my thoughts once more their vanquished will;
That I may strive and feel again the thrill
Of bounding hope, to reach its farthest goal.
Not Love, though sweet as that which Launcelot stole,
Nor Beauty, happy as a dancing rill,
Nor Gold poured out from some fond miser's till,
Nor yet a name on Fame's immortal scroll—
But what I ask, O gracious Lord, from Thee,
If to Thy throne my piteous cry can reach,
When stricken down like tempest-riven tree,
Too low for prayer to wreak itself in speech,
Is but the fair gift—ah, will it e'er be mine?
My long lost Health for my dear Valentine.

A dear friend writes of the closing days of her life: "During her hours of suffering, her bravery, her patience, and her heroism were extraordinary. One who watched by her dying bed said: 'I have seen her smile when it would have been a relief to see her cry.' She uttered no complaint and no one heard her repine. One day she gaily asked her friends what would be a suitable inscription for her tombstone; and from several that had been suggested she selected this, 'She was much loved.' Surely no words could furnish a more fitting epitaph for the young life that had done so much, enjoyed so much, suffered so much, in a little more than thirty years." The end came July 22, 1883.

Sherwood Bonner cast the witchery of her personal charm over all who surrounded her. Nature formed her to command, to love and to be loved. In childhood she was slight, but in womanhood she possessed a perfect physique. Hers was no usual beauty; her features were refined, but not regular; her complexion a delicate pink and white; expressive blue eyes, her hair an indescribable shade of auburn, and very heavy; an exquisite mouth and chin; and a hand that would have been a sculptor's joy.

The poet Longfellow in a poem dedicated to her thus describes her:

"A cloud-like form that floateth on with the soft undulating gait
Of one who moveth, as if motion were a pleasure."

Her heart was always true to the friends of her youth, and when they visited the North she was ever ready to introduce them to the circle of which she was so prominent a member. Adulation did not spoil her for she had the artist's perception with her woman's heart. Hers was a trenchant tongue and a stinging wit, but like the Venusian bard she was quite as ready to hold up her own foibles to ridicule as those of others.

She lived for her child, and nothing from her pen is more charming than the references to her in letters to friends, hitherto unpublished. In one of them she writes: "Now for my baby, she certainly is the most perfect child in the world. No human being knows how I love the little thing. Every plan of my life bears upon her future, and so long as she is left me, nothing can ever make me unhappy again."

We may not judge of her literary work as of a finished product. It is rather like a sculptor's dream that is but half realized. Lips are parted as if for speech, eyes look wistfully towards the East; but the figure is still restrained in its marble prison, and we wonder why the sculptor was stricken, the task unfinished.

But this unfinished work was fraught with rich promise. She probably wrote the first story of any writer that belongs to the distinctively Southern school. She wrote before '77 some of "The Gran'mammy Stories," and these seem to be the first negro dialect stories published in a Northern journal, and thus speaking to the whole country. She wrote in '78 "Like unto Like," a story that has to do with the reconstruction period. Into this field Cable came later, and Page selected it as a fitting period in which to locate his most ambitious work, "Red Rock." Only one writer before her had attempted to work this virgin soil, Baker in "Colonel Dunwoddie, Millionaire." In this book she refers to the "Tar

Baby Story," which she published several years later in *Harper's Monthly*. She wrote some excellent dialect stories of the Tennessee mountains, thus doing pioneer work in a field which Miss Murfree has made so peculiarly her own. She spent some time (beginning in 1880) in that portion of Illinois known as Egypt; and "On the Nine-Mile," and "Sister Weeden's Prayer" illuminate this dark world. These stories and a number of others were written in the dialect peculiar to this region. Of "Sister Weeden's Prayer" in the "new" dialect *The Nation* spoke in most complimentary terms. She seems to have been the first to give to the vernacular of this region literary treatment, thus doing for Illinois what Eggleston and Riley have done for Indiana.

Her principal writings may be grouped as follows: Early pieces, '64-'73;—Letters from Boston and Europe, '74-'76;—Short Stories published in periodicals between '73 and '83; a number of these were collected after the death of the author and reprinted in a volume entitled "Suwanee River Tales" (There are many excellent sketches in this little book, but the best are those in which Gran'mammy figures); to this period of her life belong "Miss Willard's Two Rings,"² and "From '60 to '65";³—"Like unto Like,"⁴ a novel, "The Valcours,"⁵ a novelette, "The Revolution in the Life of Mr. Balingall,"⁶ "Two Storms,"⁷ "A Volcanic Interlude,"⁸ appeared between '78 and '83. She wrote during these years besides, a number of dialect stories dealing with negro character, the mountaineers of East Tennessee, and the denizens of the Western prairie. "Hieronymus

¹ Boston, Roberts Brothers, 1884.

² Lippincott's Magazine, December, 1875.

³ Lippincott's Magazine, October, 1876.

⁴ New York, Harper and Brothers, 1878.

⁵ Lippincott's Magazine, September, October, November and December, 1881.

⁶ Harper's New Monthly Magazine, October, 1879.

⁷ Harper's New Monthly Magazine, April, 1881.

⁸ Lippincott's Magazine, April, 1880.

Pop and the Baby," "The case of Eliza Blelock" and "Lame Jerry" are all strong sketches. Some of these stories have appeared in book form.⁹

The "Gran'mammy Stories"¹⁰ reveal with force and beauty the characteristics of the old Southern "mammy," who deserves a modest place with "The chaste and sage Dame Eurykleia" and fair Juliet's nurse; and Sherwood Bonner has made posterity her debtor by preserving the lineaments of this picturesque personage whose place formerly was of so much consequence in the Southern home. But let the author unfold her character:

"In our Southern home we were very fond of our old colored mammy, who had petted and scolded and nursed and coddled,—yes, and spanked us,—from the time we were born.

She was not a 'black mammy,' for her complexion was the color of clear coffee; and we did not call her 'mammy,' but 'gran'mammy' because she had nursed our mother when a delicate baby,—loving her foster child, I believe, more than her own, and loving us for our dear mother's sake.

She was all tenderness when we were wee toddlers, not more than able to clutch at the great gold hoops in her ears, or cling to her ample skirts like little burrs; but she showed a sharper side as we grew old enough to 'bother round the kitchen' with inquisitive eyes and fingers and tongues. I regret to say that she sometimes called us 'limbs' and would wonder with many a groan and shake of her head, how we contrived to hold so much of the Evil One in our small frames.

"'I never seed sich chillern in all my born days', she cried one day, when Ruth interrupted her in the midst of custard-making, to beg leave to get into the kettle of boiling soap that she might be clean once for all, and never need another bath; while Sam, on the other side, entreated that she would

⁹ "Dialect Tales," New York, Harper and Brothers, 1883.

¹⁰ See "Suwanee River Tales."

make three 'points' of gravy with the fried chicken for dinner. (Sam always came out strong on pronunciation; his very errors leaned to virtue's side.)

"I 'clar to gracious," said poor gran'mammy, "you'll drive all de sense clean outen my head. How Miss Mary 'xpec's me ter git a dinner fitten fur white folks ter eat, wid you little onruly sinners *forever* under foot, is mo' dan I kin say. An' here's Leah an' Rachel, my own gran'chillern, a no mo' use ter me dan two tar babies!"

* * * * *

"As gran'mammy grew older, her manner softened; her love was less fluctuating. It was she to whom we ran to tell of triumphs and sorrows; she whose sympathy, ash-cakes and turnover pies never failed us. It was she who hung over our sick-beds; who told us stories more beautiful than we read in any books; who sang to us old-fashioned hymns of praise and faith; and who talked to us with childlike simplicity of the God whom she loved.

"During the troubled four years that swept like the hot breath of the simoon over our country, she was true to the family. Her love, her courage, her faithful work, helped us to bear up under our heavy trials. And when the gentle mother whose life had been set to such sweet music that her spirit broke in the discords of dreadful war, sank out of life, it was in gran'mammy's arms that she died; and neither husband nor children mourned more tenderly for the beautiful life cut short."

"How Gran'mammy Broke the News" shows the tact of the faithful old nurse in revealing to "Aunt Sarah" the fact that her soldier son, who was reported to have been killed in battle, is alive and well, in fact has but a few moments before arrived at that house. One of gran'mammy's foster children is a witness of the scene. The little girl was for going to tell her aunt as soon as her cousin arrived, but gran'mammy said: "Stop, honey, stop; Miss Katie, you forgit. Don't you know dat joy itse'f is sometimes more dan a breakin' heart kin bear? Mis' Sarah is mighty frail; an' she

mus' be made ready to meet dis shock, for dis is jes as much a *shock* as de lie dat struck her down. Blessed be de Lord for sendin' de last so quick on de heels of de fust. * * * *

“Aunt Sarah’s door was ajar. She was seated by the fire in an attitude of utter dejection. Gran’mammy was bustling about the room, an expression of perplexity on her dear old brown face. Presently with a side-long glance at poor Aunt Sarah, gran’mammy began to sing softly. I had never heard her croon anything but Methodist hymns. Now, to my surprise, she broke forth in a chant that Miss Rose was very fond of singing with us after vesper service Sunday afternoons, ‘Praise de Lord, O my soul! O my soul! and forget not all his benefits.’

“At first Aunt Sarah took no notice ; but, at a louder, more vigorous, ‘Praise de Lord, *Praise de Lord!*’ she shook her head, as if a gnat was buzzing about her ears, and looked at the singer with a dull look of surprise in her weary eyes.

“‘Gran’mammy *singing!*’ she said, in a faint voice.

“Gran’mammy came and stood directly in front of my aunt. She tried to laugh, but the tears tumbled out of her eyes so fast that she choked in the effort to swallow them.

“‘Why, yes, Mis’ Sarah,’ she at last managed to say ; ‘when my heart is light with thinkin’ of de goodness of de Lord I can no mo’ help singin’ dan if I wus a saint in heaven worshippin’ at de throne.’

“‘The goodness of God!’ echoed Aunt Sarah, drearily ; ‘He has forgotten mercy ; He has turned His face from me ; He has left me desolate and forsaken in my old age.’

“‘De Lord *never* forgits,’ said gran’mammy, solemnly ; ‘an’ He never fails to keep de promises He has made. Lean on me, Mis’ Sarah. Rest yo’ po’ tired head. Speak de name of yo’ boy, honey. It’ll do yer good ter talk about him.

“‘No, no, no!’ said Aunt Sarah, shrinking back ; ‘I thought you loved him, gran’mammy, but you could come to my room and sing. Go away, I do not want you.’

“‘I’ll go, Mis’ Sarah, in one little minute. Love Mars’ Allan ? Why, wusn’t my arms de fust ter hol’ him—a little

soft helpless innocent—even before you held him to yo' own mother's heart? An' from that very minnit I loved him. I kin see him now, a little white-headed boy, always runnin' ter his ole gran'mammy fur turnovers an' ginger-cakes. Hevn't I watched him all through de years, growin' as straight an' tall as a young poplar, full of his jokes, but with never a mean streak in him, bless de Lord! An' den, Mis' Sarah, don't you mind how he looked in his grey uniform, wid de gold lace on his sleeves; an' how his eyes would kindle an' his voice ring out when he talked of de country he loved next ter God?

“‘Gran’mammy! do you want to break my heart? Why do you torture me?’ And Aunt Sarah burst into such wild, wild tears that I was frightened.

“‘Oh! my po’ sweet mistis, I wants to *mend* yo’ heart, not break it;’ and gran’mammy, too, burst into tears, kneeling now by Aunt Sarah with her arms around her. ‘I wants you to call ter mind jes’ one thing—de commandment given by de Lord to his people, *given wid a promise*. Kin you say it over ter me?’

“‘Honor thy father and thy mother,’ said Aunt Sarah, like one in a dream, ‘and thy days shall be long in the land—’

“‘Stop dar, Mis’ Sarah,—*stop at dat promise*,’ almost shouted gram’mammy. ‘Did Mars’ Allan honor his father an’ his mother?’

“‘Always! Always! He never disobeyed us in his life. No son could have been better or nobler.’

“‘*And thy days shall be long in the land*,’ cried gran’mammy, ‘which the Lord thy God giveth thee!’ Now, Miss Sarah, jes’ *trust God*. He won’t break dat promise.’

“Words cannot do justice to the solemnity, the yearning tenderness, the pathetic earnestness, that made the dear old woman like one inspired. Wave after wave of feeling rolled over her face. I do not know how to express it, but a sacred, even a *religious* rapture seemed to hold her in its possession. Strong feeling had exalted her, I felt as if I should like to steal in and pray beside her. She still knelt, but she

kept her arms clasped about the frail figure in the arm-chair.

"Wild, vague suspicions were evidently forming in Aunt Sarah's mind. She looked at gran'mammy—a piteous, agonizing gaze. But gran'mammy's eyes met hers with steady joy.

"'What do you mean?' she gasped huskily. 'In God's name, what do you mean?'

"I mean,—lean on me, dear, lean on me,—I mean dat if our blessed Lord wus on earth to-day, an' we could kneel at his feet askin' de life of our boy, he could not give it ter us. For Allan's grave has not been dug, an' Allan is livin' not dead to-day.'

"'What have you heard?'

"'A messenger has come.'

"Then I saw a transformation. Aunt Sarah sprang up, the color and light flashing into cheeks and eyes, the vigor and erectness of youth restored to her shrunken and bowed figure. No longer a haggard old woman,—like a girl she threw open the door, and swept past me without a word."

"Gran'mammy's Last Gifts" has to do with the closing hours of her life.

The children that the old nurse had tended from infancy now gather around her bed. She had her daughter look in her chest and take from it a parcel. "The parcel was handed her, and taking off the outer covering, a white one was revealed; then a third wrapper of silver paper. Slowly, reverently, she unwound this; and there were two tiny, high-heeled satin slippers, yellow with age, but dainty enough for fairy feet.

"'De night your mother was married, honey,' said gran'mammy proudly, 'nobody waited on her but me. I unlaced de fine weddin' dress,—all lace an' satin,—an' I put de white nightgown over her head. An' when I took de slippers off her slim pretty feet, she flung her white arms aroun' my neck, an' she says, "keep 'em, gran'mammy, in memory o' dis night." An' now, my chile, arter all dese years, I gives

em ter you, de fust-born, your dead mother's weddin' slippers.'

"I could not speak for my tears. Was there ever a gift so delicately bestowed? I pressed the slippers to my heart, kissing them and the faithful black hands that had taken them from the little feet so many years ago.

"'Now my little singin'-bird,' said gran'mammy to Ruth, 'I was boun' you should remember me; so I jes' went to de picture man, an' here's my ole black face for you ter keep.'

"The likeness was perfect; and as Ruth warmly thanked her she sank back wearily on the pillows.

"'I'm tired now,' she said, 'Miss Ruthy, I'd like to hear you sing once more—before I hear de angels on de other side.'

"Ruth hushed her sobs and in her exquisite voice rolled out in those beautiful words:

'Only waiting till the shadows
 Have a little longer grown,
Only waiting till the glimmer
 Of the day's last beam is flown;
Only waiting till the angels
 Open wide the mystic gate,
At whose feet I long have lingered,
 Weary, poor and desolate.'

"'Only waitin,' murmured the dying voice. 'O my chillern!' and she spoke with sudden energy. 'In your hearts you are pityin' your poor ole gran'mammy; you are thinkin' o' de sun shinin' outside, an' de flowers, an' home an' love. You see me lyin' here, ole, an' black, an' racked wid pain. But oh! what's de sunlight of earth to de glory roun' de throne of God? what's de flowers here ter de flowers in de gyardin yonder? An' what's de love of earth ter dat waitin' for me, sinful an' onworthy though I am?'"

And with her beloved nurslings around her gran'mammy passed quietly away. Amongst her last words were, "Good-by Mis' Marthy, take good keer o' Mis' Mary's chillern."

"Two Storms," one of her latest stories, published in *Harper's Monthly*, deserves especial notice.

The story has to do with the gulf coast. We see a fair young wife with a husband who idolizes her, and a little daughter with her faithful black mammy. The mother dies suddenly, and the husband is felled by the blow. In his despair he curses Fate and would die. His child he neglects, in fact her presence is disturbing, since it but serves to remind him of his irreparable loss.

Little Dinah's lot is a hapless one. It would be tragic were it not for the devoted old nurse, who watches over her "Shorn Lamb" with a tenderness not to be surpassed by a mother. " 'I wish I were a little dog' she said once to Maum Dulcie, 'then I could lick papa's hand, and perhaps he would pat my head.'

" 'You po' little sweet rosebud!' cried the old woman, 'Ain't you got yo' ole nuss to love you an' pet you?'

"And in her compassionate tenderness Maum Dulcie did her best to spoil her charge by too great indulgence. * * * *

"When at last she aroused from the long trance of her illness, it was to find a face she had dimly feared all her life, bent above her with a rapturous protecting love, to hear a father's voice murmuring; 'My child, my little Dinah, forgive your father for all you have suffered. It is over now, and we will begin a new life hand in hand.' Safe in the purest love man ever gives to woman, she rested on her father's heart; and Maum Dulcie said weeping: 'I dunno but it's a sin to give thanks fur dat Las' Islan' storm, an' I is as sorry as anybody fur de mo'ners an' de dead, but I can't help seein' de good dat de Lord brings out o' calamity.' "

She dedicates "Like unto Like" to Longfellow in the following verses :

O poet, master in melodious art,
O man, whom many love and all revere,
Take thou with kindly hand, the gift which here
I tender from a loving reverent heart.

For much received from thee I little give,
Yet gladly proffer less, from lesser store;
Knowing that I shall please thee still the more
By thus consenting in thy debt to live.

The story has to do with that time when the South Niobe-like still mourned her dead, and was unable to grasp fully the living present. The opening chapter reveals three Dixie lassies standing on the bridge at sunset—Blythe Herndon, Betty Page and Mary Barton. Each is a real flesh and blood maiden; and while each is Southern, they differ much. Below them gurgles a limpid stream and peering into the clear water they see clinging to stones at the bottom moss, which twists itself into fantastic shapes. Above towers a lofty mountain, the setting sun now giving it a glowing aureole; from its base gushes a noble spring, the pride of Yariba, for so this Arcadian village is named. Each maiden speaks of the suggestions that this whirling, twirling moss carries to her mind, and by these and other confidences exchanged on the bridge we are enabled to form some opinion of the dispositions of the young girls, who are important characters in the story.

As the girls talk on the bridge, Mr. and Mrs. Herndon approach. They are still lovers after forty years; and sweet are the memories that crowd upon them now, for it was here they plighted their troth. They find the girls in animated conversation about the advent of a Yankee regiment that is to be stationed at Yariba for the summer. And these loyal young "rebels" are not at all agreed that the officers should be received. Mrs. Tolliver has consented to take Colonel and Mrs. Dexter to board,—brave soul, it cost her many a pang, but she did it to aid her husband's fallen fortunes. This decision causes a flutter, but finally Mrs. Oglethorpe calls and where this lady leads all others follow. With the regiment comes Roger Ellis, a man of middle age, and an ultra-radical. He wins the heart of Blythe Herndon, and then loses it again largely through his own fault.

"But death to the dove
Is the falcon's love—
Oh sharp is the kiss of the falcon's beak!"

It is best to mate with your kind, this lesson the book teaches.

The story is briefly told, but its chief charm consists not in the plot, which is rather slight, but in the local color and character portrayal. The artist sketches from life. Squire Barton (the chief of the village detectives), who always knows all the happenings of the village, and thinks he *knows* much that never happens; he is the selfsame squire whose refrain is, "Search the whole world over, there is no place like Yariba," or "We are a good breed in Yariba;" Colonel Dexter, whose eyebrows are askew, the one fierce the other mild; Civil-Rights Bill, the little darky whose antics amuse the reader, but often bring him summary punishment from his old black gran'mammy; Ellis the enthusiast whose passion is reform; Blythe's grandmother, who has ceased to pray to her God because he allowed the Southern cause to fail; Mrs. Roy, the mountain woman, called 'po' white trash' by the plantation negro, but having a pathetic life, and individuality all her own; the forerunner of many others that appear later in the sketches of Craddock, McClelland and Sherwood Bonner; Aunt Sally, the old laundress, (she would have much preferred to be called a washer'oman), who sniffs at a wash board and beats her clothes, "I'se no puny Alabama nigger, I'se fum South Caliny, I 'longst to de oldest branch uv de Tollivers;" Van Tolliver, the brave soldier, the true gentleman who fought through the war, but accepted in good faith the arbitrament of the sword, and in the New South made for himself a place; Blythe Herndon, the idealist, who loved not wisely, and waking found her dream shattered; Betty Page, the cool, calculating coquette; Mary Barton, the loving, sympathizing woman—all these are living, breathing persons, not abstractions or figures on a stage.

This book was well received by the critics. Mr. Longfellow, in a letter to Mr. Harper of the firm, Harper and Brothers, says: "It has marked and decided merit, is beautifully written, and full of interest to North and South."

Mr. S. G. W. Benjamin wrote a highly favorable review of the book for *The Literary World*, Boston, from which the following extract is taken: "When a country is ripe for it,

its literature comes unsought and the authors who are its creators appear. Among the various indications that such a literature is at hand, not the least is the publication of such a remarkable work as *Like unto Like*. In style it suggests the work of no other writer; its merits and its faults are entirely its own; its characters could only be found in our complex civilization. The plot is founded on certain phases of American society, and is evidently directly suggested by the author's personal experience and observation. * * * The characters of Blythe, Ellis, the abolitionist, Civil-Rights Bill, Mrs. Roy, and the inimitable Mrs. Oglethorpe, abundantly vindicate their right to a prominent and permanent place in our literature."

A reviewer in the Providence *Journal* says: "We welcome it as an olive branch in the truest and best sense of the word. * * * There is not an attempt at fine writing in the book, and yet it is full of painting from the life. There is excellent comedy and at least one scene of the deepest tragedy. Here and there we are reminded of Miss Austen, the common scenes of life are drawn with so much fidelity, but our American Miss Austen excels her English sister in imaginative delineation of character, and becomes the true poetess in the presence of nature."

Paul H. Hayne thus speaks of the work: "Regarded purely as a literary performance, this work, as I have before intimated, is exceedingly clever; in certain particulars even brilliantly able. The descriptions of scenery, which in most novels bore one unspeakably, are here vivid, picturesque and truthful, with occasional displays of bright, poetic enthusiasm: and of the *dramatis personæ*, some are portrayed with quiet but significant humor, some with keen, ironic shrewdness, and one at least (the 'Grandmother of Blythe Hern-don') with a degree of tragic force decidedly impressive."

The concluding extract is taken from a review of "Like unto Like" that appeared in *The Boston Courier*: "Sherwood Bonner's new novel in Harper's Library of American Fiction is a book so original, so charming, so complete in

itself, that to write a review of it must be one of the most disheartening tasks possible. Not for many years has there been produced a novel so broadly American, so unprovincial while yet retaining the peculiar atmosphere of locality, and at the same time utterly unassuming as to its representation of 'phase.' Its art is so good and so fresh that it hardly impresses us as art; it is more nearly nature. And yet the story abounds in traces of dainty skill, and delightful appreciation of the shades and angles of character, and perfect and easy adaptation of words to the transmission of meaning, without that over-solicitude as to style which has become so fatiguing in our recent New England school of fiction writers. * * * The main thing to observe is that Sherwood Bonner has seized the transition period of the feeling between South and North so perfectly that her book will probably stand in the future as the best representative of this episode in the national life; and she has done this within the compass of a simple tale which commends itself to our affections quite independently of that special illustrative interest."

In *Harper's Monthly*, *Lippincott's Magazine* and *The Atlantic Monthly*, the book was favorably reviewed. Sherwood Bonner spoke of it as "a part of her training."

Mrs. Albert Anderson, her lifelong friend, wrote of her: "To literature she was 'Sherwood Bonner,' the young author, full of genius and promise; to society she was the beautiful, fascinating woman, always the central attraction in every room she entered, but to the companions of her youth she was only 'Kate,' the loyal, brave, trusted friend, whose untimely death has taken so much from life that it can never look the same again."

"Hers was a talent" says Dr. William Kirk "sure to expand and develop; she observed life and learned from it and was in no uneasy haste to record her impressions; the future was hers through her individuality, if fate could have permitted it." But for the work that she has

done, which when weighed in the balances still sustains the test, Sherwood Bonner should possess for the students of Southern literature and Southern life, a permanent and abiding interest.









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